



Research on use of the Irish language on radio (Phase Two)

November 2018

Dr John Walsh, National University of Ireland, Galway

Dr Rosemary Day, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick

Dr Philip Fogarty, National University of Ireland, Galway

1. Introduction

1.1 Aims and background

This paper is the report of Phase Two of an ongoing research project on the provision of Irish language programming on all licensed AM/FM radio stations in the state, with the exception of stations that broadcast exclusively through Irish. A report on Phase One of the project on such provision during 2017 was published in January 2018 (Walsh & Day, 2018). The project stems from the fact that very little information has been gathered on the precise amount of Irish language output on Irish radio. We believe that this information gap needs to be addressed on an ongoing basis. The communicative needs of Irish speakers include provision of broadcast media in their own language across all radio stations and the provision of services in Irish is among the statutory requirements placed on all Irish radio broadcasters, particularly RTÉ. There are specific provisions about Irish in the Broadcasting Act of 2009 (Oireachtas Éireann, 2009) and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) includes the fostering and promotion of quality programmes in the Irish language among its strategic objectives (BAI, 2017).

The Irish language has played a role in broadcasting since the establishment of Ireland's first radio station 2RN in 1926. The founders of the state imagined that radio would play a key role in the development of Irish identity in nation-building (Watson, 2003; Pine, 2002; Day, 2012). Following the consolidation of the existing Dublin and Cork stations in 1933, a national audience could hear programmes in Irish for the first time, due to the introduction of a high-powered transmitter in Athlone. Although a separate service was promised for the Gaeltacht in 1926, a distinct station did not materialise until 1972 with the establishment of Raidió na Gaeltachta (Day, 2012). Some Irish is broadcast on RTÉ's other radio stations but as a full-time national broadcaster, RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta provides the majority of Irish language radio broadcasts in the country. Following the introduction of the Radio and Television Act of 1988, the pirate stations that had proliferated during the 1970s and 1980s

were put off the air and new commercial broadcasters were licensed. Irish was granted only limited recognition in the schedules of stations that came on air from 1989 onwards. As a result of a campaign by language activists in Dublin, Raidió na Life was established in 1993 as a community of interest service to serve Irish speakers in the capital (Ó Drisceoil, 2007).

This report begins by outlining the legislative and policy frameworks for Irish language broadcasting. The methodology is then explained and finally the findings are presented in both narrative and tabular form. The report is the result of Phase Two of a longer-term study of radio broadcasting in Irish on services that operate almost entirely in English. Readers are advised that most of the contextual material in sections 2 and 3 below remains largely unaltered since the report on 2017 as this information has, for the most part, not changed. The overall aim of the longer-term project is to understand radio managers' experience of Irish language programming, to identify both positive initiatives and challenges associated with such programming and, ultimately, to influence the policy framework so that radio stations can be supported in providing additional material in Irish. We hope to provide such an analysis as future funding allows.

The authors wish to thank Conradh na Gaeilge for providing funding for Phase Two of the research as part of their *Bliain na Gaeilge* budget for 2018. We also acknowledge the financial support of the School of Languages, Literatures and Culture, NUI Galway.

1.2 Impact of Phase 1

The report from Phase 1 (2017) was published on the website of the Audio Research Centre at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick on 11 January 2018 (see <https://audioresearchcentre.wordpress.com/research/>). It gained traction in the media with reports in English in *The Irish Times* (Cantillon, 2018), *The Irish Examiner* (Baker, 2018) and on community station NEAR FM (Day, 2018). It was covered in Irish on Tuairisc.ie (Ó Gairbhí, 2018a), RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta (Walsh, 2018b) Nuacht RTÉ/TG4 (Walsh, 2018d) and BBC Radio Ulster (Walsh, 2018c). The report also elicited responses from a number of broadcasters, some of which were critical. As a result of the report, John Walsh and Rosemary Day were invited by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Irish Language and the Gaeltacht to present their findings in Leinster House on 1 May 2018 (Oireachtas Éireann, 2018b; see press coverage in McGee, 2018). Deputies in attendance expressed interest in the findings and said that they would like to see the recommendations progressed and the presentation was covered in the media (Walsh & Day, 2018a). The Joint Committee also invited representatives of the BAI to respond to the findings at a presentation on 29 May (Oireachtas Éireann, 2018a). On 10 July, representatives of Conradh na Gaeilge met senior representatives of the BAI to discuss the report and to press for greater support for Irish language provision. A summary of the report was also sent by John Walsh to the BAI as part of a consultation on its *Draft Strategy on Broadcasting Services* which was open from April

24th until 19 June. The *Draft Strategy* made a brief reference to the Irish language in the foreword when it outlined that a key deliverable of the strategy would be to ‘develop and implement a revised Broadcasting Services Strategy that continues to facilitate dynamic licensing policies and plans and promotes quality programming in the Irish language’ (BAI, 2018c). The *Strategy* is discussed at point 3 below.

2. Legislative framework

The BAI and its predecessor, the Independent Radio and Television Commission, have operated under various broadcasting acts since 1988. The Broadcasting Act of 2009 is the most relevant, over-arching legislation. It contains specific provisions on the Irish language both linked to the duties of the Authority itself and to the duties of broadcasters. The most significant requirements are placed on public broadcasters (RTÉ and TG4) but Irish is also listed among the criteria to be evaluated when assessing applications for an independent radio licence.

The composition of the BAI itself, its statutory committees and its objectives are covered in Articles 9 and 25 of the Act (Oireachtas Éireann, 2009). In article 9 (1), matters related to the development of the Irish language and Gaeltacht affairs are listed among the areas of expertise required of members of the Authority or its committees. In article 25 (2) (h) on the objectives of the BAI, it is stated that the Authority and its statutory committees ‘will promote and stimulate the development of Irish language programming and broadcasting services’. Article 154 (1) of the Act specifies that the Authority will submit a scheme to the Minister to support programmes in a number of areas including the Irish language. The current version of this scheme is entitled ‘Sound and Vision 3’. According to Article 155 (1), the objective of the scheme is to ‘develop high quality programmes based on Irish culture, heritage and experience’ including programmes in the Irish language. Under article 156 (2) it is provided that 7 per cent of net receipts from television licence fees will be paid through the scheme to be managed and developed by the BAI.

Independent broadcasters are covered by Articles 66, 67 and 69. Article 66 relates to the Irish language element of the licensing of radio services. Article 66 (2) (d) states that the BAI’s Contract Awards Committee will have regard to ‘the quantity, quality, range and type of programmes in the Irish language’ when making a decision about a licence. Article 66 (3) specifies that the Committee ‘shall have particular regard to the continuance and advancement as a spoken language of the Irish language’ when making a decision on a licence for an area which includes a Gaeltacht district.

Any breaches of the contractual obligations are the concern of a statutory committee of the BAI known as the Compliance Committee. Article 28 relates to the duties of the Compliance Committee to ensure that a broadcaster complies with the terms of its licence. Article 28 (1)

(a) refers to the obligation of the Compliance Committee to monitor the fulfilment of the terms and conditions of the licence and under sub-section (b) the Committee is charged with ensuring that the terms and conditions of the licence are implemented. The amount of programming in Irish that was agreed in the station's contract is included in those provisions. There is a significant difference between such general monitoring and the specific duty outlined in article 29 (1) (c) which obliges a broadcaster to ensure that news and current affairs comprise 20 per cent or two hours of programming between 0700 and 1900, peak broadcasting hours. Nonetheless, the provision of programmes in Irish, however loosely defined, remains a statutory requirement that applies to all licensed stations included in this study.

The Act deals separately with Ireland's public service broadcasters, RTÉ and TG4. In article 82 (1), 'matters pertaining to the development of the Irish language' and 'Gaeltacht affairs' are listed as areas of expertise required when members of the RTÉ board are being appointed. In article 102 (2) (b) it is provided that the RTÉ annual report 'about performance commitments' will address Irish language programming, among other matters. The Act places significant duties on RTÉ regarding Irish language programming. Article 114 (2) (a) commits RTÉ to ensuring that its programmes reflect the various traits which make up Irish culture and that it will 'have special regard for the elements which distinguish that culture and in particular for the Irish language'. Article 114 (3) states that RTÉ will broadcast a comprehensive range of programmes in Irish and English, including news and current affairs programmes (Oireachtas Éireann, 2009).

3. Regulatory framework

Currently the BAI has no specific strategy statement or code of practice dealing with Irish language broadcasting but its most recent *Strategy Statement* contains the objective to '[f]oster and promote quality programming in the Irish Language' (BAI, 2017: 2). In order to achieve this objective the BAI promises that it will:

Develop and implement and review an action plan that supports increased representation of the diversity of Irish society in the broadcast media with particular focus on gender and the Irish language (<http://www.bai.ie/en/about-us/our-strategic-goals/>).

The recent *Broadcasting Services Strategy* makes a number of references to the Irish language in response to four submissions from the public, including one from John Walsh. It states that one of its objectives is to 'foster and promote quality programming in the Irish language and to encourage the development of Irish language initiatives across the broadcasting sector' (BAI, 2018a: 14). The BAI adds that it 'is open to exploring other service types, including niche and Irish language radio services' (ibid: 15) and that its licensing plans will promote diversity and pluralism including in the Irish language (ibid: 16). An ancillary document to the Strategy contains further information about the BAI's position on Irish:

Acknowledging that the Irish language is fundamental to its work, the Authority agreed that its approach to Irish language content should be more pro-active and supportive. However, the proposals submitted to increase Irish language commitments for current broadcasting contractors were not appropriate for inclusion in the BSS. The Authority must have regard to the requirements of the 2009 Act in this regard' (BAI, 2018b: 11).

The BAI also commits itself to developing 'an Irish Language Action Plan, which is due for implementation at the end of 2018' (ibid: 11). We welcome this commitment to produce such a plan as clearly it is urgently needed. Our proposals at the end of this paper could form part of that plan, specifically the need for the BAI to be proactive in ensuring that Irish language programming is indeed fostered and promoted. While resources are limited and the demands on staff time are many, the Irish language needs to be made a priority for the regulatory authority so that the stations they regulate recognise the need for them to broadcast more Irish language material. Some work has been done over the years to ensure that all stations have regard to the language. For instance, the following reference to Irish was contained in advice on applying for community radio licences which was available online up to 2016: '[Programme Policy] Statements will be expected to include clear commitments in relation to areas such as speech/music ratio, Irish language programming, music policy and externally-produced programmes' (BAI, 2009: 11). When applicants apply for a licence, they are asked to make a statement about the amount and type of programmes they intend to broadcast (a) in Irish and (b) bilingually. Similar guidance is published with each licensing call for commercial stations. This means that all stations must state the commitment they will make to broadcasting in the Irish language as part of their contract for a licence to broadcast. This provides an opportunity for the BAI to achieve of its strategic objectives, i.e. fostering and promoting quality Irish language programmes.

RTE, as a public service broadcaster, has long-standing legislative responsibilities to the Irish language and, along with independent broadcasters, is regulated by the BAI under the terms of the 2009 Broadcasting Act. In 2015, RTÉ published a five-year action plan, *Meáin Ghaeilge RTÉ*, to boost its Irish language output. The plan's first aim is to extend Irish throughout the schedules of all RTÉ services:

We will increase the amount of Irish heard on radio, with more Irish language and bilingual programming on RTÉ Radio 1, RTÉ 2fm and RTÉ fm. RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta will have a particular focus on growing its audience through inclusively [sic], and on ensuring relevancy as media consumption patterns change (RTÉ, 2015: 4).

Specific aims regarding the development of Irish on all radio services are outlined in the plan and RTÉ also commits itself to developing a new youth radio service in Irish (RTÉ, 2015: 10). Again, three years since its publication, there is no sign of such a new service and little improvement in the amount of Irish broadcast on the current RTE stable of stations, excluding RTE Raidió na Gaeltachta.

4. Methodology

Phase 2 of the research began in April 2018 and involved all full-time analogue radio stations operated by RTÉ or licensed by the BAI to broadcast on AM/FM. The parameters of the research remained the same as the report on 2017: as the aim of the survey was to ascertain the level of Irish language output on radio, stations which broadcast entirely in Irish were not surveyed.¹ Stations operating online or on DAB only,² stations awarded content provision contracts,³ part-time stations and stations outside the state⁴ were not included. It was also decided to omit hospital (institutional) stations due to their very small size and specific licensing agreements with the BAI.⁵ A total of 57 stations were surveyed. During the period in question, East Limerick Community Radio closed and Community Radio Kilkenny City was established.

4.1 Analysis of schedules

The first part of Phase 2 was to analyse the stations' schedules as advertised on their websites. The database constructed in Phase 1 was updated according to the following categories of information:

- a) type of station;
- b) hours and minutes per week broadcast in Irish;
- c) programme title;
- d) language content (in Irish or bilingual);
- e) time of broadcast;
- f) additional information, i.e. is the material original or syndicated;
- g) total output.

4.2 Correspondence with stations

From April to August 2018, all radio stations were contacted by letter and asked to confirm our initial findings, based both on what was advertised on their websites and the information they provided us in 2017. The researchers again contacted Lisa Ní Choistealbha of the Independent Broadcasters of Ireland (IBI) and Martina O'Brien of CRAOL (the Community Radio Forum of Ireland) so that sectoral representatives were aware of the project in advance of receiving their invitation to participate.

Where there was no response from stations after two weeks, follow-up telephone calls were made or emails sent to station managers. During the course of telephone

¹ These include four stations operating entirely in Irish, Raidió Rí-Rá (Dublin), Raidió Fáilte (Belfast), Raidió na dTreabh (Galway) and RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta

² For instance, RTÉ's six digital stations: RTÉ Radio One Extra, RTÉ 2XM, RTÉ Gold, RTÉ Junior and RTÉ Pulse.

³ The DAB/online-only stations Radio Maria and UCB Ireland.

⁴ Raidió Fáilte.

⁵ Institutional stations are exempt from most of the content requirements applied to commercial and community broadcasters. See Section 68 of the Broadcasting Act 2009.

communication, some managers provided further information about initiatives and challenges related to providing Irish language programming and such responses were documented. Further clarification of details continued until the Autumn when all information was finally verified. The response rate was 100%, an improvement on the 90% rate from 2017. We wish to thank the IBI, CRAOL and all stations for their assistance in ensuring an excellent response rate. Individual stations' outputs from year to year are not compared in this paper, as not all stations provided full information in Phase One.

4.3 Presentation of data

Programmes reported as being entirely in Irish were weighted at 1.0. Due to lack of resources, it was not possible to listen to every Irish language programme identified. If a station reported a programme as 'bilingual', it is included in the hours and minutes of Irish language content but weighted at 0.5. This may not be an entirely accurate reflection of Irish language content but we believe that it is the best possible estimate in the circumstances. Although station managers were invited to estimate the percentage of Irish in a 'bilingual' programme, the majority did not provide this information. If programmes were reported to contain only a few words or phrases in Irish, they were discounted as it was impossible to assess how much actual Irish was spoken. Similarly, although most stations reported broadcasting extra material in Irish in March during *Seachtain na Gaeilge*, this information was also discounted due to a lack of clarity and because the aim of the survey was to estimate regular rather than occasional output. Further qualitative research will provide further information about incidental and occasional use of Irish. Some station managers complained about this in response to the findings of Phase One, but the project is concerned with regular programming in the Irish language rather than occasional or very brief offerings.

4.4 Next stages of research

It was hoped that Phase Two would allow us to conduct interviews with a representative sample of station managers in order better to understand their understandings of Irish language programming. However due to the work of updating the database and the limited funding available, this was not possible. Further funding is required to develop this qualitative analysis. A further phase will be to compare stations' successful license applications to the BAI with their Irish language output, in order to ascertain the extent to which their contractual aims are being met. There is also scope to conduct case-studies of best practice in different profiles of stations.

5. Findings

The following is a summary of the main findings of the survey.⁶ See the accompanying Table for full information.

5.1 Broadcasting hours in Irish

The number of weekly hours broadcast in Irish or bilingually continues to be very low compared to the stations' overall outputs. The average weekly output in Irish is 03:12 hours (including repeats). For the most part, programmes in Irish continue to be broadcast outside peak hours (after 1900, overnight or early on Sunday morning). Similar to 2017, of the commercial broadcasters by far the highest weekly Irish language output is from the youth stations iRadio (34:30 hours on both the Northeast/Midlands and Northwest stations, or 20.5% of their total output). However, the majority of these hours are broadcast overnight when listenership is negligible. Removing the iRadio hours would decrease the average output considerably. The next highest output of any station is on the Spin youth stations (9 hours on Spin Southwest, or 5.3% of their output and 04:30 hours on Spin 103.8, or 2.7%). Wired FM (Limerick) is the leader in the community sector with 05:30 hours or 11.5% of its output, followed by Flirt FM (Galway) with 06:30 or 6%.⁷ It is significant that Wired FM and Flirt FM are both aimed primarily at a young student cohort.

5.2 Original programming

A large majority of stations (50/57 or 88%) produce their own original Irish language or bilingual material, or share it with another station to which they are linked, for instance Spin and iRadio, Northern Sound FM and Shannonside FM, Classic Hits 4FM⁸ and Sunshine 106.8, and the RTÉ stations.

5.3 Rebroadcast of Irish language programming

Seven stations, or 12% of the total (BEAT 102-103, Community Radio Youghal, Dundalk FM, Liffey Sound FM, Phoenix FM, Raidió Corca Baiscinn, Ros FM), rebroadcast only external programming in Irish and do not generate their own material. These comprise six community stations which rely on material from the Dublin-based Raidió na Life⁹ and the commercial regional station BEAT 102-103 which rebroadcasts a programme from the Spin

⁶ This report was compiled by Dr John Walsh and Dr Rosemary Day in their capacities as academics working in NUI Galway and Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick. This work is independent of John Walsh's involvement in Flirt FM as a volunteer on programmes not broadcast in Irish. It is similarly independent of Rosemary Day's service on the board of the BAI and on its Compliance Committee. Dr Philip Fogarty was employed as a part-time Research Assistant and was based at NUI Galway.

⁷ Total output equals the amount of hours daily the station is on the air, in this case 24 hours. Smaller community stations tend to have more limited schedules. For instance, Wired FM was on air 48 hours per week and Flirt FM 109 hours per week during the period of research. This compares to 168 hours for most stations broadcasting around the clock.

⁸ The name of this station was changed to 'Classic Hits' in October 2018.

⁹ Mostly 'Scoth na Seachtaine', a weekly compilation of highlights from Raidió na Life.

group. Community stations Dublin South FM, Flirt FM and Wired FM supplement their own programmes with additional material from Raidió na Life (see table). Apart from news bulletins in Irish, the remainder of Irish language output on RTÉ Radio One is repackaged from RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta (see table).

5.4 No Irish language programming

The report from Phase One found that a small number of stations broadcast no Irish at all in their schedules. In 2018 all stations reported some Irish language provision, although it was very limited in some cases. However, some stations have begun to address their lack of provision in this regard.

5.5 Irish language inserts

Four commercial stations (98FM, C103, Cork's 96FM and Q102), have no dedicated Irish language or bilingual programme and broadcast only Irish language or bilingual inserts three or four times per day. These last on average 60-90 seconds or less than half an hour a week in total. Today FM broadcasts similar daily inserts and only broadcasts full Irish language programmes for two hours on bank holidays (5-6 times per year). Stations broadcasting solely or mostly inserts account for 8.8% of the total (5/57).

Seven commercial stations (Classic Hits 4FM, BEAT 102-103, East Coast FM, Limerick's Live 95FM, LMFM, Tipp FM and Red FM) broadcast inserts in addition to full Irish language programmes. These inserts are sometimes shared between stations.

5.6 Gaeltacht counties

There are Gaeltacht districts in seven counties (Cork, Kerry, Galway, Mayo, Donegal, Meath and Waterford) and these are served by a mixture of local, regional and national stations.

- a) *Cork*: Neither C103 nor Cork's 96FM broadcast full programmes in Irish. Red FM broadcasts 01:14 hours per week (under 1%). Spin Southwest (which covers the Cork Gaeltacht) provides 9 hours weekly (5.3%).
- b) *Kerry*: Radio Kerry broadcasts 3 hours in Irish per week (approximately 2%). Spin Southwest (see above) also covers the Kerry Gaeltacht.
- c) *Galway*: Galway Bay FM broadcasts 02:45 hours per week (a little more than 1.5%). The most populous Gaeltacht in Ireland is located in Galway. Regional station iRadio Northwest provides a high percentage of Irish language programming (see 5.1 above). Connemara Community Radio, whose franchise area includes part of the Gaeltacht, broadcasts 02:25 hours (approximately 3.5%).
- d) *Mayo*: Midwest Radio broadcasts 03:17 hours in Irish per week (approximately 2%). Mayo is also served by iRadio Northwest.
- e) *Donegal*: Highland Radio broadcasts 03:35 hours per week in Irish (just over 2%). There is a large Gaeltacht area in Donegal. South Donegal is served by Ocean FM,

which broadcasts half an hour per week (approximately 0.25%). Donegal is also served by iRadio Northwest.

- f) *Meath*: LMFM, the station whose franchise area includes the Meath Gaeltacht, broadcasts 02:43 hours per week or just over 1.5% of output. Meath is also served by regional station iRadio (Midlands and Northeast) which provides a high percentage of Irish language output (see above).
- g) *Waterford*: Local station WLR broadcasts just over half an hour a week in Irish (approximately 0.25%). Regional station BEAT 102-103 broadcasts 04:35 hours per week in Irish (2.7%).

The relative paucity of Irish language programming on commercial stations serving the Gaeltacht is significant due to their high listenership within their franchise areas, as successive JNLR surveys indicate.

5.7 Irish on RTÉ services

Despite the extensive statutory provisions covering the use of Irish by RTÉ, the weekly output of services other than RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta remains very low, with approximately 02:30 on RTÉ Radio 1, 01:45 on RTÉ 2fm and only 15 minutes on RTÉ lyric fm. Some commercial and community stations broadcast higher amounts of Irish.

5.8 Style of programmes and inserts

Limited resources have not permitted us to monitor more than a sample of Irish language output. However the titles of programmes provide clues about content, such as *Ceol agus Caint*, *Craic agus Ceol*, *Craic an Lae* and *Aon Chraic?* These indicate a light-hearted and entertainment-based approach to Irish language content. Other Irish language programmes are linked to traditional music. The exceptions to these are the youth-based stations which provide short links in Irish between contemporary music, just as they do in their English-language programming. While there are limited examples of magazine-type programmes on stations' schedules (for instance *Ar Muin na Muice* on NEAR FM, *Splanc* on Newstalk and *Caint Chiarraí* on Radio Kerry), no current affairs-type programming in Irish is clearly identifiable. This would suggest that Irish content is seen by stations as not being directed at fluent speakers within the community, but at those who have had limited contact with the language since school, or as a sop to vague licensing requirements. Further research is required to ascertain what proportion of output is aimed at Irish speakers rather than at the general population who have limited knowledge of the language (see policy recommendations at 6.2 below).

5.9 Irish language news service

The provision of regular news bulletins in Irish can be considered a fundamental service occupying a prestigious place in a radio station's schedule. RTÉ broadcasts daily news bulletins in Irish on RTÉ Radio 1 and RTÉ lyric fm and from Monday to Friday on RTÉ 2fm. No

commercial or community station provides a daily news service in Irish although this was the case in the past.¹⁰ Highland Radio in Donegal provides news in Irish once a week. The Saturday news service in Irish on Liffey Sound in Dublin has been discontinued since 2017.

5.10 Online information

Few stations provide detailed online information about the Irish language and programmes are not consistently published on websites. Where Irish language inserts are used, these are not advertised online. Therefore we were unable to rely on websites as a reliable source. Titles of programmes, names of presenters and other basic information often contain errors but these have been corrected in the accompanying table.

6. Conclusions and policy proposals

6.1 Conclusions

Thirty years after the legalisation of independent radio in Ireland, the Irish language continues to have only a marginal role on radio stations other than those broadcasting in Irish. This is in spite of statutory provisions regarding Irish in the licensing process that oblige all stations to include it in their programming. With a small number of exceptions, stations broadcast only minimal amounts of Irish and almost invariably outside peak hours. The lack of Irish language programming during primetime across most schedules is a cause of concern as it represents the marginalisation of the language to times when listenership is lowest. Although youth stations broadcast the highest number of hours, the majority of them are comprised of mostly chart music with only short links in Irish.

Apart from RTÉ, no station broadcasts a daily news service in Irish and the output tends towards contact with and social acceptance of the language ('let's make Irish fun') or towards the culturally stereotypical (traditional music). Although a majority of stations generate their own material, several community stations only rebroadcast programmes from Raidió na Life. While we recognise the restraints under which such stations operate, we question if such an approach is in keeping with the aims of the legislation or indeed with their own aims and ethos, i.e. to provide relevant programming for the varied communities that they serve?

The legislation is weak and imprecise regarding the Irish language. It does not lay down specific targets or percentages in relation to Irish language output by comparison, for example, with detailed provisions on news and current affairs. Instead, the relevant committee of the BAI, the Contract Awards Committee, is obliged only to 'have regard' to Irish when making a decision on awarding a licence. This leaves open the possibility that

¹⁰ The national commercial station Today FM provided news headlines in Irish in the past. Its predecessor Century Radio (1989-1991) broadcast news bulletins in Irish four times daily and these were syndicated to many local stations.

only a minimal amount of Irish may be offered by the stations and accepted by the BAI when the contract is being negotiated. The Compliance Committee deals primarily with breaches of regulations as a result of complaints from listeners. Due to lack of resources, the BAI executive's monitoring of stations' output is scant at best and does not appear to prioritise the use of the Irish language on air.

The provisions regarding stations whose franchise areas include the Gaeltacht are more stringent, as the Contract Awards Committee is required to 'have particular regard to the continuance and advancement as a spoken language of the Irish language'. This has potentially far-reaching implications for such stations but the survey indicates that most of them fall far short of that requirement. Broadcasting only minimal amounts cannot reasonably be understood to be in accordance with advancing Irish as a spoken language in the Gaeltacht.

Music-based programmes with links in Irish, such as those broadcast by the iRadio and Spin stations, have a place in radio broadcasting and may encourage a youth audience to engage with Irish. However this falls far short of serving all the communicative needs of Irish speakers both inside and outside the Gaeltacht.

Although further research is required, we conclude tentatively that the Irish language requirement is often understood by stations as involving minimal amounts of Irish aimed at general listeners who have passive knowledge of Irish from school, and not at active and fluent speakers of Irish. This is a reflection of a wider social dynamic which prioritises symbolic recognition for Irish over its active promotion as a spoken language. There is a glaring need for further qualitative research not only to measure the quality of the provision but to develop a framework to assess such provision in the future. Such a qualitative study could also investigate the understanding of and attitudes towards Irish language programming among station management and broadcasters themselves.

6.2 Proposals

We repeat the policy proposals made in 2017 with some amendments, based on the findings of Phase 2. We do not believe that the question of the lack of Irish language programming can be addressed without adopting as many as possible of the following proposed measures:

For the legislators

- We again urge that the relevant provisions of the Broadcasting Act 2009 be strengthened in order to enable the BAI to pursue a more pro-active Irish language policy in tandem with radio stations.
- We propose the revision of Article 66 (2) (d) of the Act in order to ensure greater provision of Irish language programming across all stations.

- We recommend that Article 66 (3) of the Act be amended to strengthen obligations on stations covering Gaeltacht areas.
- Members of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Irish Language and the Gaeltacht expressed a desire that the legislative provisions on Irish be made much more specific. We concur with this view.

For the regulator

- We welcome the references to Irish in the BAI's *Broadcasting Services Strategy* and the commitment to produce an Irish Language Action Plan. We urge that this be produced as a matter of urgency in order to develop a more pro-active Irish language policy.
- As many stations expressed frustration to us about the lack of co-ordinated support for Irish language programming, we again urge the BAI to re-introduce its Irish Language Advisory Committee and Irish Language Development Officer. These would require adequate resources in order to:
 - (a) Promote awareness and understanding about the Irish language in the sector;
 - (b) Develop and implement a pro-active Irish language policy with all broadcasters.
- Such supports should bring about a greater awareness of the types of listeners who are to be served by Irish language programmes. Based on our experience of the Irish language community, such programmes need to be targeted at two specific groups:
 - (a) Those who speak Irish fluently and regularly, within and outside the Gaeltacht;
 - (b) Those who know some Irish, are well-disposed towards it and would like to hear more of it on their radio station.

There is a risk at present that Irish language programming falls between two stools and does not adequately serve either group. TG4's new 'twin pole' strategy, which delivers programming based strongly on Irish to a core group of fluent speakers and music, sporting and English-language programming to a larger group which has some ability and interest in Irish is worth considering in terms of its effectiveness and its reception among viewers (Esslemont, 2017; see also Ó Gairbhí, 2018b).

- A key objective of any new policy should be to increase the provision of Irish language programming for young listeners. This could be initiated in conjunction with the youth stations, many of which already broadcast relatively high amounts of Irish.
- We recommend that Irish be carefully considered in periodic reviews of all stations regulated by the BAI.

For the stations

- We propose that all stations work towards producing their own Irish language programming of relevance to their listeners. Stations should commit to gradually increasing the amount of Irish broadcast during peak listening hours.
- Stations with Gaeltacht districts in their franchise areas should deliver significantly more programmes in Irish than other stations. This could be ensured through the introduction

of a quota in contracts for such stations. In recognition of their existing contractual commitments, radio stations should begin to address this gap in their schedules.

- Youth stations should continue to develop Irish language programming, given the importance of empowering and supporting future speakers of the language.

For the Irish language sector and community

- Irish language bodies should engage pro-actively with legislators and the regulator to lobby for increased provision of Irish language programming on all media. It was public pressure, managed and organised by committed language activists in the past, that led to the establishment of RTE Raidió na Gaeltachta in 1972, Raidió na Life in 1993 and TG4 in 1996. We now urge the relevant Irish language organisations to show leadership and take a pro-active role in lobbying for increased programming.
- Listeners to radio services have a statutory right to complain about any aspect of programming covered by the legislation and all stations are obliged to have a facility in place to accept complaints. While we recognise that only a small minority will be sufficiently motivated to submit a complaint about anything, we remind listeners unhappy with Irish language provision that such a facility exists to them.
- In a spirit of co-operation with stations making notable efforts with Irish, we similarly urge listeners to engage positively with Irish language programmes where praise is warranted. Despite the marginal position of Irish overall, there are examples of innovative and high-quality programming on some stations. The Irish language community needs to engage with such stations in order to inform them that such material generates listenership and to encourage the provision of more programming. Some of the gaps in Irish language provision could be addressed by partnerships between stations and Irish language organisations which are not without precedent (Walsh, 2018a), thereby creating a virtuous circle of programme generation. Many more listeners could provide feedback and encouragement through social media to the presenters, producers and station managers.

This is a longitudinal study and the present report draws on research conducted for Phases One and Two. While there are some hopeful signs in the findings year on year, in order to achieve a meaningful level of provision in Irish, more significant progress is needed on all fronts: the legislators, the regulator, the stations and the listeners themselves.

References

- BAI, 2009. *BCI Policy on Community Radio Broadcasting*. Dublin: BAI.¹¹ This policy is no longer available at www.bai.ie.
- BAI, 2017. *Statement of Strategy 2017-19*. Dublin: BAI. Available at: <http://www.bai.ie/en/about-us/our-strategic-goals/>.
- BAI, 2018a. *Broadcasting Services Strategy*. Dublin: BAI. Available at: <https://www.bai.ie/en/consultations/draft-broadcasting-services-strategy-bss/>
- BAI, 2018b. *Consultation on BAI's Draft Broadcasting Services Strategy & Licensing Regulatory Measures*. Dublin: BAI Available at: <https://www.bai.ie/en/bai-publishes-revised-broadcasting-services-strategy/>
- BAI, 2018c. *Draft Broadcasting Services Strategy*. Dublin: BAI. Available at: <http://www.bai.ie/en/consultations/draft-broadcasting-services-strategy-bss/>.
- Baker, N., 2018. 'Irish-language content on radio is negligible, says report'. *The Irish Examiner*, January 12. Available at: <https://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/irish-language-content-on-radio-is-negligible-says-report-465633.html>.
- Cantillon, 2018. 'Fuzzy radio rules do Irish speakers no favours'. *The Irish Times*, 11 January. Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/media-and-marketing/fuzzy-radio-rules-do-irish-speakers-no-favours-1.3356564>.
- Day, R., 2012. 'Voice of a nation: the development of radio and Ireland'. In: Hand, R. & Traynor, M. (eds.) *Radio in Small Nations: Production, Programmes, Audiences*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 27-39.
- Day, R., 2013. 'Radio and the Irish Language'. In: Howley, K. (ed.) *Media Interventions*. New York: Peter Lang, 210-224.
- Day, R., 2018. Interview, *Northside Today*, NEAR FM, 26 January.
- McGee, H., 2018. 'RTÉ's use of Irish as infrequent as most of its commercial rivals – report'. *The Irish Times*, 2 May. Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/rt%C3%A9-s-use-of-irish-as-infrequent-as-most-of-its-commercial-rivals-report-1.3481327>.
- Ó Drisceoil, F., 2007. 'Raidió na Life: Raidió na Réabhlóide'. In Day, R. (ed.) *Bicycle Highway: Celebrating Community in Ireland*. Dublin: The Liffey Press, 173-178.
- Ó Gairbhí, S.T., 2018a. 'Ról imeallach ag an nGaeilge ar stáisiúin raidió in ainneoin dualgais reachtúil – taighde nua'. Tuairisc.ie, 11 January. Available at: <https://tuairisc.ie/rol-imeallach-ag-an-ngaeilge-ar-staisiuin-raidio-in-ainneoin-dualgais-reachtuil-taighde-nua/>.
- Ó Gairbhí, S.T., 2018b. *Súil Eile*. Dublin: Cois Life.
- Oireachtas Éireann, 2009. Broadcasting Act (No. 18 of 2009). Available at: www.irishstatutebook.ie.

¹¹ The Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI) became the BAI in 2009. This document was published by the BAI in 2009 as an interim policy pending review and hence the reference to BCI in the title.

Oireachtas Éireann, 2018a. 'Irish language committee continues hearings on the use of Irish on radio'. Press release by Joint Committee on the Irish Language, the Gaeltacht and the Islands, 28 May. Available at: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/press-centre/press-releases/20180528-irish-language-committee-continues-hearings-on-the-use-of-irish-on-radio/>.

Oireachtas Éireann, 2018b. 'Irish language committee to discuss the use of Irish on radio'. Press release by Joint Committee on the Irish Language, the Gaeltacht and the Islands, 30 April. Available at: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/press-centre/press-releases/20180430-irish-language-committee-to-discuss-the-use-of-irish-on-radio/>.

Pine, R., 2002. *2RN and the Origins of Irish Radio*. Dublin: Four Courts Press.

Raidió Teilifís Éireann, 2015. *Meáin Ghaeilge RTÉ/Action Plan 2015-2019*. Dublin: RTÉ. Available at: <https://static.rasset.ie/documents/about/18286-rte-meaingaeilge-actionplan-eng-v4-screen.pdf>.

Walsh, J. & Day, R., 2018a. Interview, *Adhmhaidin*, RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta, 1 May.

Walsh, J. & Day, R., 2018b. *Research on use of the Irish language on radio (January 2018)*. Galway and Limerick: National University of Ireland, Galway and Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick. Available at: <https://audioresearchcentre.wordpress.com/research/>.

Walsh, J., 2018a. 'An Gael agus an Raidió'. *Comhar*, 78 (9): 12-17. Available at: <https://comhar.ie/iris/78/9/an-gael-agus-an-raidio/>.

Walsh, J., 2018b. Interview, *Adhmhaidin*, RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta, 11 January.

Walsh, J., 2018c. Interview, *Blas*, BBC Radio Ulster, 6 February.

Walsh, J., 2018d. Interview, *Nuacht*, RTÉ and TG4, 11 January.

Watson, I., 2003. *Broadcasting in Irish: Minority Language, Radio, Television and Identity*. Dublin: Four Courts Press.